

# Chapter 1

## A VERY BRIEF *HER*STORY OF THE WORK DIVA

### ARE YOU A DIVA OR A DOORMAT?

‘There are only two types of women: goddesses and doormats.’

– Pablo Picasso (*Spanish painter; 1881–1973*)

If you do not know who Pablo Picasso is, please do not tell anyone. Google the name before you even begin reading the rest of this book, and find out. You cannot survive without a good general knowledge if you want to get ahead in business – or in life in general, in fact. Although I was flippant about business books in the Introduction, here’s the bad news: If you want to be taken seriously in your career, you need to invest time in serious content.

In business, you are measured by your understanding of the world at large, the corporate world in general and your company in particular. Knowing who does what to whom in the latest Marian Keyes is not going to win you the big promotion or pay rise you are chasing. ‘That’s not fair,’ you might moan. ‘Men read golf magazines and that seems to help *them!*’ No, it’s not fair, but if you want a book about what’s fair and how things *should* be in the world, then go back to reading that novel. If, however, you want a book that will help you to get ahead in the real – and very



unfair – world of business as a woman, you've come to the right place. Sit back, kick off your shoes, grab a glass of wine and drive your career forward in comfort.

Back to Picasso: I happen to agree with his sentiment. My apologies to any devout feminists reading this book (*if you are a radical feminist, best give this book to someone else, as you won't find any male-bashing here*), but just think about what Picasso said for a minute. Imagine this not as a sexist judgement, but rather as a way for women to view themselves. If you see yourself as a diva, you become a diva; if you see yourself as a doormat ... sorry for you. Nowhere in the world is your self-image as important as in the business world. People see you as you see yourself.

More women than I care to remember have told me that they have poor self-esteem because they get 'put down' by others – their mothers, sisters, fathers, ex-lovers, husbands, bosses, blah, blah, blah. Eleanor Roosevelt (*American humanitarian; 1884–1962*) said: 'Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission.' Why have so many women allowed others to make them feel inferior? What happened? When did our self-esteem disappear down the drain with the dishwashing liquid? Let's take a quick peek at history to try to find an answer.

Only one hundred years ago, women in the Western world were not allowed to vote, go to university, hold down certain professional jobs or belong to most clubs. A woman's place was in the home – women were widely acknowledged to have no head for business, finance or law. As recently as 1950, women were still being *sold* in China, for heaven's sake. My friend Louise Chain, a brilliant executive coach in Australia, wrote an article recently about how, just fifty years ago, two women were told to forego their places in medical school because not enough male students had qualified for the next year – even though these women were at the top of their classes! A lot has changed in a very small space of time.

We owe a huge debt to our suffragette sisters, and all the other people – including many men – who fought for the rights of women. But with a history of being suppressed, repressed, subjugated, dominated and generally tyrannised, women are still battling to escape from the box in which they were kept for centuries.

Back to Picasso and Eleanor Roosevelt. Are you a goddess or a doormat? Do

you give people permission to put you down? This needs to stop. Now. This book's purpose is to guide you through the minefield in which you find yourself and help you to become the Work Diva you have always dreamt of being.

## THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE VICTIM

‘The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.’ – Oprah Winfrey  
(*American talk show host, media mogul and philanthropist; 1954–?*)

There are a few stereotypes which people, particularly women, need to deal with: those within us and those outside us. We can change the way in which we see – and treat – ourselves, and we can even change the way we behave, but we can do very little to change the perceptions and behaviour of others. Accept this as the first rule of getting ahead in business and in life. The next step is to stop the blame. Stop being a victim. After centuries of real unfairness, it's time for women to take charge of their dreams, and damn the rest.

The world is *not* fair – people are born disabled or lose those they love; people who don't deserve it earn more than you, or will be promoted sooner than you. You can't change this, but what *can* you change? How about starting with a change in outlook? Nobody likes to be surrounded by the 'I'm so hard done by' specialist. You know *you're* guilty of some serious self-pity when

- the eyes of the person to whom you are whingeing glaze over, or they stop responding to you and your tale of woe, or
- your friends and family seem to be avoiding you.

We all fall into this little routine from time to time, but if you find yourself grouching *a lot*, well, then it's time for a change.

Quick check: How often do you find yourself blaming something, or someone, other than your attitude for your problems? If you blame external factors regularly, you may have a deep-rooted 'victim mentality' and not even realise it. Blaming other

people or even other forces (saying, for example, ‘I’m so unlucky’) is the single biggest indicator of a victim state of mind – and the quickest possible way to damage your career. Blaming others is the antichrist of success and can be identified with the continual whine of ‘it’s not fair’. If you use any of the following victim war cries, then I have bad news for you – you have become a casualty of the victim mindset:

- It’s because I’m a woman/not a man/too young/too old.
- It’s because I’m not pretty/sexy/thin/fat enough.
- It’s because I’m black/white/not black enough/not white enough.
- It’s because I’m (insert religion here).
- It’s because he/she doesn’t like/love/appreciate/notice me.
- It’s because my mother/father didn’t love me/abandoned me/beat me.
- It’s because of apartheid/Black Economic Empowerment/the government/the colonialists/crime/poverty/...
- It’s because I have such bad luck/bad karma/a difficult life.

The good news is that all the above woes can be cured! All you need is a change in outlook. Stop moaning and start *counting your blessings*. Just this one tiny adjustment to your mindset will change your view – and your life – forever.